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RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000257

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/16/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [IS](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAELI GENERAL'S COMMENTS ADD FUEL TO GAZA FIRE

REF: A. ANKARA 252

[1](#)B. ANKARA 237

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: IDF Major General Mizrahi's February 13 comment that Turkey "should first look in the mirror" before judging Israeli operations during the most recent Gaza crisis have hit Turkish defenders of the bilateral relationship -- in particular, the Turkish General Staff (TGS) -- below the belt. On February 14 the MFA summoned Israeli Ambassador Levi and delivered a formal letter of protest requesting official clarification. The message was repeated in a Turkish General Staff (TGS) statement, claiming Mizrahi's words were "unfortunate and unacceptable." Israeli Embassy officials view the IDF spokesman's subsequent February 14 disassociation of the Israeli military from Mizrahi as sufficient. Nevertheless, MFA officials underscored that the Prime Ministry and TGS expect more. Representatives of both sides bemoan Mizrahi's timing, noting that the bilateral relationship had finally begun to recover from events surrounding the Gaza crisis. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Israeli Land Forces Commander Major General Mizrahi's February 13 statement that Turkey "should first look in the mirror" regarding the so-called Armenian genocide and treatment of its Kurdish population before criticizing the GOI over its Gaza operations had struck a particularly jarring chord with the GOT. During a rally in Samsun, PM Erdogan reportedly declared that "the loud voice of Israeli officials betrayed a guilty conscience." FM Babacan added that Mizrahi's comments were not helpful during such a sensitive period in the bilateral relationship. On February 14 the Turkish General Staff posted a message on its web page stating that Mizrahi's words "distort the facts...are unfortunate and unacceptable...do not comply with the authorities and responsibilities of the office he occupies, and more importantly have the potential of harming the national interests of both countries." Both Erdogan and the TGS called upon the GOI to make a comprehensive statement on the issue. Subsequently, Israeli Defense Force (IDF) Spokesman Brigadier General Benayhu issued a statement February 14 that disassociated the Israeli military from Mizrahi's comments and clarified that his views do not represent the IDF; he was speaking as an independent citizen.

[1](#)3. (C) MFA Israel Desk Officer Rauf Alp Denktas told us February 17 that the MFA summoned Israeli Ambassador Levi to the Ministry February 14 to deliver a formal letter of protest requesting an official GOI response to Mizrahi's statement. (NOTE: While Denktas commented that the tone of the meeting was serious, Israeli Embassy Spokesman Zarouk said that MFA officials highlighted that both the note and

summons were directed from outside the Ministry. END NOTE)  
Denktas added that based on the TGS statement and general GOT environment, the IDF spokesman's comments would not be sufficient. However, Zarouk told us that the GOI is unlikely to make any further comments on the issue.

14. (C) Zarouk and Denktas reported that Chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) Basbug and Israeli Chief of General Staff Ashkenazi spoke late February 16 regarding Mizrahi's comments. Both commented that the tone was civil; Basbug and Askenazi repeatedly underscored the strategic importance of the bilateral relationship. Zarouk noted that the GOI intends to make the call public on February 18. However, Denktas said that, while the call was constructive, the TGS's website message should be viewed as a warning that the IDF must make distinct steps to demonstrate its remorse, namely an official statement.

15. (C) Zarouk lamented that Mizrahi's comments came on the heels of two positive signs that the GOT was ready to resume relations. He reported that President Gul hosted prominent Turkish Jewish Community leader Jak Kamhi for dinner the prior week. Gul gave Kamhi a letter to deliver during his subsequent trip to Tel Aviv underscoring the importance of the bilateral relationship and stating that he would like to visit Tel Aviv before the year's end. Zarouk added that the IDF received on February 13 the TGS's commitment to participate in Anatolian Eagle, a joint Israeli-Turkish military exercise, later this year. He said that there has been no mention from the TGS of rescinding that decision. Denktas also noted the bad timing, adding that the MFA had

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believed prior to Mizrahi's statement that the worst was past.

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Jeffrey